

Classic Poetry Series

**Jeanne Robert Foster**  
**- poems -**

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## Jeanne Robert Foster(1879 - 1970)

Jeanne Robert Foster was an American poet from the Adirondack Mountains. She was born Julia Elizabeth Oliver in Johnsburg, New York.

In 1896 she married Matlock Foster, and lived in Rochester, New York. She studied drama at the Stanhope-Wheatcroft Dramatic School, and worked in magazine journalism. She became a leading fashion model. The couple then moved to Boston; she continued to work as a journalist there and in New York, becoming literary editor of the American Review of Reviews.

In 1916 she began to publish narrative verse about the Adirondacks. From this period she travelled in Europe, met important figures of modernism, and co-operated with the collector John Quinn in building up his contemporary art collection. After Quinn's death in 1924 Jeanne helped prepare the collection of his letters that became the John Quinn Memorial Collection at the New York Public Library. The collection includes an extensive correspondence with Joseph Conrad.

In 1932 she moved to Schenectady, where she worked as a social worker.

Jeanne's friends included many of the period's leading authors and artists. She was particularly close to [Ford Madox Ford](http://www.poemhunter.com/ford-madox-ford/), [Ezra Pound](http://www.poemhunter.com/ezra-pound/), and [William Butler Yeats](http://www.poemhunter.com/william-butler-yeats/). She also had a relationship with the English author and occultist [Aleister Crowley](http://www.poemhunter.com/aleister-crowley/).

She is buried near her friend John Butler Yeats, the painter and father of William Butler Yeats, in the Chestertown Rural Cemetery in the Adirondacks. Her own papers can be found in the Jeanne R. Foster-William M. Murphy Collection at the New York Public Library and at Harvard University's Houghton Library, which holds her correspondence with poet and author Ezra Pound.

# The Bitter Herb

O bitter herb, Forgetfulness,  
I search for you in vain;  
You are the only growing thing  
Can take away my pain.

When I was young, this bitter herb  
Grew wild on every hill;  
I should have plucked a store of it,  
And kept it by me still.

I hunt through all the meadows  
Where once I wandered free,  
But the rare herb, Forgetfulness,  
It hides away from me.

O bitter herb, Forgetfulness,  
Where is your drowsy breath?  
Oh, can it be your seed has blown  
Far as the Vales of Death?

Jeanne Robert Foster

# The William P. Frye

I saw her first abreast the Boston Light  
At anchor; she had just come in, turned head,  
And sent her hawsers creaking, clattering down.  
I was so near to where the hawse-pipes fed  
The cable out from her careening bow,  
I moved upon the swell, shut steam and lay  
Hove to in my old launch to look at her.  
She'd come in light, a-skimming up the Bay  
Like a white ghost with topsails bellying full;  
And all her noble lines from bow to stern  
Made music in the wind; it seemed she rode  
The morning air like those thin clouds that turn  
Into tall ships when sunrise lifts the clouds  
From calm sea-courses.

There in smoke-smudged coats,  
Lay funnelled liners, dirty fishing-craft,  
Blunt cargo-luggers, tugs, and ferry-boats.  
Oh, it was good in that black-scuttled lot  
To see the Frye come lording on her way  
Like some old queen that we had half forgot  
Come to her own. A little up the Bay  
The Fort lay green, for it was springtime then;  
The wind was fresh, rich with the spicy bloom  
Of the New England coast that tardily  
Escapes, late April, from an icy tomb.  
The State-house glittered on old Beacon Hill,  
Gold in the sun. . . . 'Twas all so fair awhile;  
But she was fairest - this great square-rigged ship  
That had blown in from some far happy isle  
On from the shores of the Hesperides.

They caught her in a South Atlantic road  
Becalmed, and found her hold brimmed up with wheat;  
'Wheat's contraband,' they said, and blew her hull  
To pieces, murdered one of our staunch fleet,  
Fast dwindling, of the big old sailing ships  
That carry trade for us on the high sea  
And warped out of each harbor in the States.

It wasn't law, so it seems strange to me -  
A big mistake. Her keel's struck bottom now  
And her four masts sunk fathoms, fathoms deep  
To Davy Jones. The dank seaweed will root  
On her oozed decks, and the cross-surges sweep  
Through the set sails; but never, never more  
Her crew will stand away to brace and trim,  
Nor sea-blown petrels meet her thrashing up  
To windward on the Gulf-Stream's stormy rim;  
Never again she'll head a no'theast gale  
Or like a spirit loom up, sliding dumb,  
And ride in safe beyond the Boston Light,  
To make the harbor glad because she's home.

Jeanne Robert Foster